

Back Again, Back Again: A Feast, a Festival, Part 1

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode five: A Feast, a Festival, part one.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyaas: I look back at my battle clothes at least four times a day. Once as I get up, to see if my other dreams have manifested-- or, if the armor was a dream-thing, finally faded. The second is right before I leave for school, because mundanities and function seem so much less entertaining than putting those clothes back on and laying on my floor and remembering. The third is upon my arrival home, a check to make sure nothing had happened to them, to make sure that the mediocrity of school hadn't killed this maybe-dream in my head. And the fourth -- if there's no extras scattered in, because I'm a creature of nostalgia and a weak sense of will -- is before I

go to bed. Because what if this is the night? What if, tonight, I fall asleep and wake up and find myself back in Rhysea, ready to greet my friends, ready to reap the bounty of the world I tried so hard to change?

I never put them back on, though, the bracers and shirt and pants and boots. It feels -- god, *wrong*, somehow, like if I do the last of the magic will leave them.

And then -- there's also the part of me that wonders that if I do -- if that would bring me back. If I went to sleep in my Rhysean clothes, if it would be the spark I was missing that's necessary to bring me *home*.

But I'm a coward. So I don't, because the one thing less terrifying than a dangerous little hope is finding out that it meant nothing at all. Because what if they mean nothing? What if I truly am stuck here forever?

What if -- what if there never was another place I got lost in, after all?

See, because I swallowed my fear and sent a picture of the clothes to my friend, a question attached: *do you remember these?* Because I -- I had to know if I was losing my mind, years worth of memories carved into my brain and nothing but an outfit to prove they ever really existed.

And... her response? *Oh, so you finally got around to distressing your rogue cosplay?*

But -- I don't -- I've never -- I've checked every camera roll. I always take pictures of my sewing projects as they come along, and there's nothing. The bracers are leather and engraved metal, lily-of-the-valley and peonies and girls casting out magic and wearing crooked crowns -- made in the style of the sword I'd bore. I don't know how to make something like that. I wouldn't even know where to begin.

And as I insisted this upon her, she seemed to think I was a bit silly for asking at all -- especially when the only explanation I could give for where else they'd have come from without sending my heart into a nervous stutter was an *I don't know*.

So -- did I dream the whole thing? I remember it, I swear -- clear as day. Do you know how in dreams, everything is slightly... off? Your glasses can't stay on your nose, no matter how many times you push them up. You spend a whole dream insisting you know a monologue, a dance, an event, but when it comes time for you to recite it you can't remember what it was any more than a first line, a first move. It seems vivid and real in your dreams, an impossibility meant to occur, but when you wake up, it fades into disillusionment, and there's only a second or two where you keep believing in whatever it is you dreamt. You wrack your brain for proof that it *did* exist, *does* exist, but you can't find anything and let it slip away.

When you're awake, you know it was a dream three breaths after you've woken up. This isn't the same. The more I wrack my brain, the clearer it all becomes, and I know -- I know -- it can't be a dream.

And yet -- doubt comes in, in cases like this.

Maybe I am crazy. Isn't that something your brain never wants to acknowledge? I can't focus on school -- I feel so much older than everyone sitting around me, crammed into a desk where I don't belong. Do I care what the hell president William Filmore did? Tell me something about him. Do it. Go. You can't -- you can't -- for all the title *president* gave him, he's a footnote in history. You memorize his name and move on.

I don't want everything I've seen to be like that. I don't want Callia and Leander and even godsforsaken Cassius Rex to be a footnote in my life. I don't want them to become a dream I've stopped believing in.

So I suppose I should keep telling you -- this -- *someone* what I'm feeling. And I'll hope it proves me right or wrong, some way or another.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you'd like to hear more

about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an Attribution License. The song was retrieved from FreeMusicArchive.org. Visit the description of this episode for full copyright information and a link to the page. Sound effect attribution, similarly, can be found in the episode description.

If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. You are important in this world and have a role no one else can fill. You are loved. I hope you have a wonderful day.